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ABSTRACT

A model for improving instructional skills was developed to offer guidance for administrators or supervisors responsible for overseeing the performance of first year teachers. Developed from research findings on the nature of teaching and learning and the characteristics of an effective teacher, an integral component of the instructional improvement model is systematic observation of teacher performance. The first step in the process is a pre-conference between the supervisor and beginning teacher in which agreement is reached on the observation focus and intent. Teacher input is desirable in selecting the focus of the observation and agreement on observation tools and procedure. The program emphasizes that the supervisor should approach the observation with an open mind, observe objectively, and focus on the agreed-upon targets. Systematic observation processes include personal, video or audio tapes, as well as rating by students, peers, and self assessment by the beginning teacher. A post-observation conference presents an opportunity for discussion between the supervisor and the teacher and the formation of a mutually agreed-upon course of action for improvement. A list of touchstones for beginning teachers is included. (JD)

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TEACHER SELF-IMPROVEMENT

A CHANGE MODEL FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS*

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Knowledge and skill area #6 of the 1983 AACTE meeting theme Essential Knowledge for Beginning Educators, focuses on teacher evaluation and adaptation to change (e.g. continuing improvement in the school and classroom; self-assessment and improvement; observation and conferral techniques with the beginning teacher's support system--peers, supervisors and professors.) The model presented herein is intended to address primarily knowledge and skill area #6, with implications for areas #2 (Instructional Planning and Decision Making) and 4 (Management of Instruction); it applies to both methods courses and clinical experiences.

Any treatise centered upon teacher improvement must begin by defining 'teacher', and what a teacher does, proceed to the product--learning, and attempt to discuss and/or delineate those teaching practices which are considered more effective than others. Further, both general and specific practices designed to assist teachers in instructional improvement should be addressed. Improvement models, if presented, should be accompanied by rationale and research findings as well as explanation and practical application. In this presentation I will attempt to follow such a pattern in discussing an improvement model for beginning teachers.

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TEACHING

"What is a teacher"? As defined by the Second Handbook of Research on Teaching, a teacher is a person who is engaged in interactive behavior with one or more students for the purpose of intentionally effecting an attitudinal cognitive, or motor change in those students.[1] This change effected in students is learning. Learning is what students are supposed to do when teachers teach. When teachers teach effectively, students learn. But what is effective teaching? Despite myriad studies on effective teaching, identifying precise teaching characteristics as measures of effectiveness remains a difficult, and perhaps improbable task.

The school's effectiveness depends on the school's teachers' effectiveness. The Encyclopedia of Educational Research defines teacher effectiveness in terms of behaviors of students, not behaviors of teachers (eg. the amount of student progress toward a specific educational goal); thus effectiveness is a product of interaction between certain teacher characteristics and other variables. Teacher performance, on the other hand, refers to teacher behaviors. It too is a product of interaction between certain teacher characteristics and variables and as such is used as a basis from which teaching effectiveness can be inferred.[2]

No single teaching practice can predict effectiveness; student achievement is, first, associated with a composite of teaching practices. Eisner believes that scientific inquiry into teaching can provide frames of reference. It would be a mistake, he feels, to consider education a science expected to yield prescriptions for excellent teaching. Possessing a set of discrete teaching skill ensures nothing; the belief that discrete teaching skills can be aggregated to form a whole is a misconception of what it means to be skilled in teaching. Skilled teaching, he believes, requires the ability to recognize dynamic patterns, grasp their meaning and invent ways to respond to them. Overly rigid prescriptions presents a danger.[3]

In his optimism on teaching research yields, Gage suggests there exist "relationships between teacher behavior and pupil achievement and attitudes on which a scientific basis for the art of teaching may be erected." He cautions, however, that we should not expect most of the single research studies to yield statistically significant results. He distinguishes between two methods of research (1) studying relationships between intact patterns of teaching (such as open and direct) and pupil learning and (2) studying relationships between the many variables of teaching styles and pupil achievement and attitude. Almost no teaching research to date can satisfactorily demonstrate causal, correlational effects. But true experiments are ethical and feasible; in the long-run, better teaching effectiveness will be determined, in the main, from a continual search for a scientific basis for the art of teaching.[4]

Rubin contends that effective teaching makes use of proven methods. Effective teachers deal systematically with specified ends but invent and improvise when necessary, blending attitudes, intentions, knowledge and discernment into an integral force. Choosing educational aims of high worth, using ingenious ways to achieve these aims and pursuing their achievement with great skill and dexterity best contribute to the cultivation of excellence in teaching.[5]

Fred Stocking presented a colorful commentary on what is an effective teacher. He said a good teacher is one who

- can tell students a lot of answers to a lot of questions, but the best teacher can play dumb while helping students think out the answers for themselves,
- is an eager and enthusiastic talker, but the best teacher knows how to be quiet and patient while students struggle to formulate their own thoughts in their own words,
-strives to keep his class under control, but the best teacher knows that he must first be able to control himself,
- earns his salary many times over, but the best teacher also earns a deep and

secret satisfaction which would be ruined if he tried to talk about it in public or convert it into cash.[6]

The variables referred to earlier in the Encyclopedia of Educational Research discussion of teacher performance and teacher effectiveness include teacher training, student learning experiences and outcomes, classroom variables, school variables, and individual student variables.[7] Each has an impact on teacher effectiveness; focusing on only one limits greatly the view of teacher effectiveness.

Examining the process-product approach to teacher characteristics research, Rosenshine and Furst (1971) reported five variables as strongly related to student achievement.

clarity- clear and easy to understand, explaining concepts clearly, lessons appear to be "just right", an organized process of teaching.

variability- teacher's ability to employ various materials, procedures, and levels of questioning, having flexible classroom behavior.

enthusiasm- teacher is interested, excited, involved in the subject matter, teacher enthusiasm is closely related to student achievement.

task oriented- teacher can keep student working toward goals, in a creative fashion.

student opportunity- providing student learning opportunities to solve problems and then be tested on it.[8]

And yet, subsequent research (Brophy 1976) which investigated relationships between student learning and these 5 characteristics is inconclusive.[9]

Recent teaching effectiveness research (Brandt 1983) shows that students achieve higher test scores when their teachers

. . . work with whole classes rather than individuals,

. . . maintain a high success rate,

. . . have a high level of participation and,

. . . keep students focused on materials to be learned.[10]

INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT [11]

Basic to students' success in school is learning. The teachers' primary function is twofold: (1) to help students establish reasonable objectives in order to attain the overall goal of learning and (2) to help students set sub-goals within that general learning goal. However, the diversity of the input (students) makes the teachers' function no easy task. As teachers, it is necessary to direct dissimiliar talents, potentials and expectations toward a general, accepted goal, given the diversity of input. Necessary too, is both the logistical and encouraging moral support afforded teachers in their attempts to work with students. Teachers must be equipped with proper physical materials necessary to perform their function well. Sufficient space, proper, and well-maintained equipment are basic; so too is the encouragement and support afforded by supervisory/administrative personnel.

Instruction, as delineated here, may be considered synonymous with teaching. Instruction therefore is the act of working and interacting with students to help them learn; it takes place in a given building called a school and is performed by designated personnel called teachers. Instruction embodies varied styles and modes -- each of which, no matter how well presently implemented, may still be improved. It is this process of improvement of instruction on which this treatise focuses. As both logistical and encouragement support are necessary for teachers, so too is the concomitant support for instructional improvement activities afforded by competent supervisory/and or administrative personnel.

The goal of supervision is teacher self-improvement. Instructional supervision, a subset of supervision is defined as those activities engaged in by school personnel for improving instruction through changing teacher behavior. Systematic observation, a further subset is often referred to as clinical supervision. And while the two may not be exactly congruent, they can be interchangeable, depending on one s philosophy of supervision. The Systematic Observation sequence is an integral component of the Instructional Improvement Model presented herein. It consists of four elements:

(1) Pre-Conference

(2) Classroom Observation

(3) Analysis & Strategy

(4) Post-Conference

Pre-Conference. The pre-conference is an informal meeting between supervisor and beginning teacher in which agreement is reached on the observation focus and intent. Teacher input is desirable in selecting the one focus of the observation (dependent on lesson objective and teacher needs), agreeing on the observation tools and procedure and making tentative post-observation plans as regards time, place and procedures to be followed.

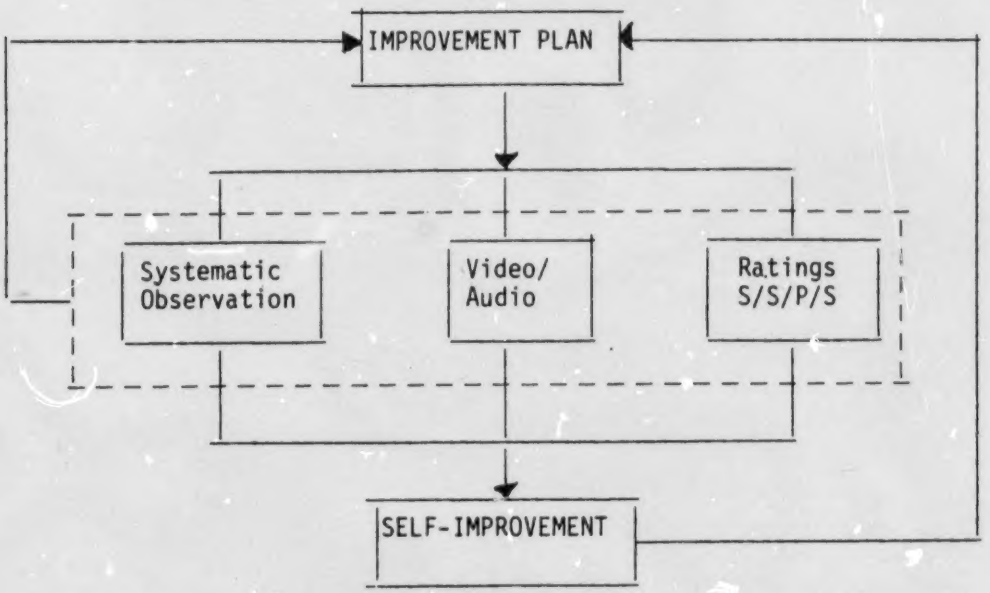
The Classroom Observation. The supervisor should approach the lesson observation with a clear, open mind. Care should be taken to ensure that the supervisor's presence will not impact negatively on the lesson. Observing objectively, focusing on agreed-upon targets and not pulling surprises on the teacher are key.

Analysis and Strategy. Once the supervisor obtains observation data, it must be analyzed -- in relation to the focus of concern. After analyzing data, the supervisor must plan a strategy of presenting the data to the teacher. Strategy should be geared toward creating positive improvement; deciding what goals to strive for, determining which data is relevant and what issues to treat, and finally deciding limits of responsibility for instructional improvement are all important factors in setting up the

Post-Conference. The supervisor and teacher must confer about the lesson observed, and plan a strategy for improving teaching. The conference consists of three elements -- the opening, the transition, and the closing; and element content and method should vary depending on the previous steps and intent.

IMPROVEMENT MODEL [12]

The improvement model consists of a plan, implemented by using any or all of the systematic observation process, video or audio tape and various ratings (student, self, peer, supervisor) and resulting in self-improvement. The model is designed so that the improvement plan can be re-checked or re-focused after use of one or more of the implementation elements. Too, the model is closed, with constant recycling back to the improvement plan.



Any model is only as effective as the person implementing it. The supervisor wishing to use this model must have a knowledge base and implementation skills. A good grasp of teaching analysis, educational psychology, self-esteem skills, adult psychology, motivation theory, and others, are necessary components of the knowledge base. Needed too are skills to apply the knowledge base.

SEVEN TOUCHSTONES FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS [13]

Knowing and Accepting Oneself

Building Self Confidence

Developing Attitude

Planning

Involving Students

Identifying Students' Level

Knowing One's Colleagues

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12. Adapted from Krajewski, Robert J., "Clinical Supervision: To Facilitate Teacher Self-Improvement," Journal of Research and Development in Education, 9, (Winter 1976), pp. 58-66.

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